

First and Second Language Acquisition

Students learn a second language differently from their first. The ESL component of the NTCF describes the way ESL learners develop proficiency in English. Additionally, it is beneficial for educators to be aware of some basic differences between learning one's first language and then learning a second or third language in a school environment. Such differences include:

First Language (L1) Learning/Acquisition	Second Language (L2) Learning/Acquisition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one to one (eg child with parent) • input/response from parents/caregivers in a positive secure environment • occurs over time • 'here & now' contexts • oral then written • learning accompanies developmental stages • language develops in response to motivation of physical, emotional and cognitive needs (more intrinsic than extrinsic) • spontaneous • accompanies conceptual development • learners (as children) do not know that they don't know the language • attempts at meaning are the focus for development • risk taking is encouraged with positive feedback • learners are accepted as 'talkers' of the language <p>(adapted from ESL in the Mainstream Teacher Development Course 2002)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one teacher with many learners • input from a teacher in a restricted, more threatening environment • often no time (or very reduced) • different cultural and situational contexts • oral and written together OR written to oral • learning does not relate to developmental stages • motivation is variable (more extrinsic than intrinsic) • has to be planned • should be linked to concepts in L1 • learners know that they don't speak the language • grammatical/vocabulary errors are often given a great deal of attention • risk taking is modified by the embarrassment of mistakes • learners are not seen as 'talkers' of the language until they are very competent

The L1 learner is highly motivated to learn the home language as it allows communication and fulfillment of basic social, emotional and physical needs within the family and community. It is this language learning environment of the first language (eg relevant contexts, acceptance of attempts) that teachers should strive to establish and implement when teaching all ESL learners, irrespective of whether the English language learning is occurring in remote, rural or urban settings.

Teachers can approximate the language learning environment of L1 through the following strategies:

- small group work increasing likelihood of individual tutoring opportunities
- creating a positive, secure and non-threatening classroom environment
- providing opportunities for learner repetition and practice of target language
- introducing new language together with concrete activities eg teaching 'positional' language in Physical Education, Science and Mathematics could be done using obstacle courses or simple procedures
- scaffolding oral language thoroughly before setting writing tasks
- explicitly teaching the cultural attitudes and norms embedded in the target language eg register, modality, tone etc
- accepting the language offered by the learners and with positive feedback, modelling Standard Australian English version (scaffolding)
- allowing opportunities for spontaneous language use in both first and second language
- encouraging risk taking with positive feedback, responding to the learner's meaning rather than how the message is given.

(ESL FundamenTals: *First and Second Language Learning* 2004)

In remote Indigenous schools or where the enrolment is predominantly ESL it is important that the teacher

- creates a variety of English language situations which are relevant and rich
- ensures that each language situation is explored in depth, revisited and developed

In both mainstream and remote Indigenous schools the teacher needs to

- teach socio-cultural information which will help learners understand how first language speakers use the language of science.
- set up situations where learners can practise using the mathematics language learned in class.
- provide a classroom where learners feel supported and valued and able to take risks.
- develop a print rich environment which reflects the units of work/topics/vocabulary being studied.
- recognize that every lesson is a language lesson and provide language support across the curriculum.
- plan for group work and collaborative learning.
- scaffold learners' utterances to foster increasing control of oral mathematics language.
- model the language while 'doing' the activity.
- accept approximations of English.

(ESL FundamenTals 2004, *Language Learning in Context*)

Stages of Development

Most current theorists suggest that there is a continuum of learning - that is, predictable and sequential stages of language development, in which the learner progresses from no knowledge of the new language to a level of competency closely resembling that of a native speaker. These theories have resulted in the identification of several distinct stages of second language development.

Overview of Second Language Acquisition Theory

These stages are most often identified as:

Stage I: The Silent/Receptive or Preproduction Stage: This stage can last from 10 hours to six months. Students often have up to 500 'receptive' words (words they can understand, but may not be comfortable using) and can understand new words that are made comprehensible to them. This stage often involves a 'silent period' during which the students may not speak, but can respond using a variety of strategies including pointing to an object, picture, or person; performing an act, such as standing up or closing a door, gesturing or nodding; or responding with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Teachers should not force students to speak until they are ready to do so.

Stage II: The Early Production Stage: The early production stage can last an additional six months after the initial stage. Students have usually developed close to 1,000 receptive/active words (that is words they are able to understand and use). During this stage students can usually speak in one-or two-word phrases, and can demonstrate comprehension of new material by giving short answers to simple yes/no, either/or, or who/what/where questions.

Stage III: The Speech Emergence Stage: This stage can last up to another year. Students have usually developed approximately 3,000 words and can use short phrases and simple sentences to communicate. Students begin to use dialogue, can ask simple questions and answer simple questions. Students may produce longer sentences, but often with grammatical errors that can interfere with their communication.

Stage IV: The Intermediate Language Proficiency Stage: Intermediate proficiency may take up to another year after speech emergence. Students have typically developed close to 6,000 words and are beginning to make complex statements, state opinions, ask for clarification, share their thoughts, and speak at greater length.

Stage V: The Advanced Language Proficiency Stage: Gaining advanced proficiency in a second language can typically take from five to seven years. By this stage students have developed some specialized content area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities if give occasional extra support. Students can speak English using grammar and vocabulary comparable to that of same-age native speakers.

Understanding that students are going through a predictable and sequential series of developmental stages helps teachers predict and accept a students' current stage, while modifying their instruction to encourage progression to the next stage.

www.nwrel.org/request/2003may/overview.html